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HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS' RANKINGS OF ENGLISH CLASSICS¹

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Perhaps you will allow me to recall the purpose and plan of this study to your minds by quoting a few paragraphs from my paper of a year ago, in which I presented the idea in the fewest words into which I was able to condense it.

REVIEW OF THE PLAN

The aim in compiling the list of College-Entrance Requirements has been, obviously, to present a liberal, representative selection of English classics of moderate length, and this aim has been excellently realized. Such a selection is, moreover, a thoroughly logical one. Whether it is pedagogical, however, is surely open to question. It takes full and careful account of the subject-matter to be presented, but it takes no account whatever of the high-school student to whom the presentation must be made. The question is not even raised as to which classics, or what kind of classics, the high-school boys and girls like, or can get hold of, or themselves feel to be worth while.

Our problem then, it seems to me, is clear. The thing that we have to do first is to collect data of an objective character in regard to the tastes of our students. From such data we can hope to deduce criteria that will enable us to select a list that shall take account of our students, as well as of the resources of our literature.

The plan I propose for collecting such data is as follows: That the teachers of this Association shall take ten minutes in each of their English sections on some day near the close of the present semester [this was the first semester of 1910-11], and ten minutes again in each section on a day near the close of the second semester of this year; that they shall write on the blackboard a list of the classics studied during the semester about to close; and shall ask the stu-

¹ A report presented to the Illinois Association of Teachers of English at Urbana, November 24, 1911.

dents to copy the titles in the order of their preference—putting first in their lists the book which they themselves liked best and felt that they got the most out of, and so on. The students should be asked to sign their names to the lists, principally in order to indicate the sex, and to put down their age and high-school class. If we could get fifty teachers, each having on an average fifty students in English, to take this matter up, we should get 2,500 rankings of the books in the present list by the high-school students themselves, with the sex, age, and grade indicated on each ranking.

The rankings will be tabulated to show how many times each one of the books in the list was ranked first, how many times second, third, and so on.

If we should find any book or group of books ranked low in a large percentage of the lists, that would seem to indicate that this book or group is open to serious question. We should have a basis, on the other hand, for including more books of the general type represented by general favorites. In other words we may hope to have at last something like definite data on which to base a revision of the College-Entrance Requirements.

COLLECTING THE DATA

The plan was carried out exactly as proposed above. About the middle of December, 1910, letters were sent out to the teachers who had handed in their names at the meeting, and to a few others whose names were received later in various ways, reminding them of the rankings to be taken for the first semester and suggesting the method which it seemed best to follow. Again about the middle of last April similar letters were sent out, and by the first of July practically all the data were in.

The response to these letters was exceedingly generous. Roughly speaking, there were sent in rankings of books read, in either the first semester or the second semester of 1910-11, by about 8,000 high-school boys and girls of this state and adjoining states.

IRREGULAR AND DOUBTFUL LISTS DISCARDED

The first step, unfortunately, in handling these data had to be the throwing out of a rather large number of rankings.

To begin with, there were, of course, a number of teachers who thought of better ways of taking the rankings and who took them in accordance with these improved methods. The different new plans proposed were undoubtedly in almost every case really better than the one the Association had adopted, except in the one point of being more complicated. Almost the sole merit of the plan

adopted was its extreme simplicity; but this one merit made this plan practicable—obtained the co-operation of the teachers of over two hundred high-school classes when, I venture to say, not one-fourth of that number could have spared the time and energy that would have been required for co-operation in a more elaborate scheme. But the principal point—aside from any question of the relative merits of the new plans suggested and the plan which the Association had undertaken—is that the results sent in, where improved methods of taking the rankings had been used, were, of course, *different* in form and content from the other lists received, and could not, therefore, be used with the rest.

The first set of lists that had to be discarded consisted, then, of those which had been taken in some irregular way. It seemed wise to throw out, also, the lists in which only two books appeared—where only two books had been read during the semester. With the field of choice narrowed to this minimum, it seems clear that the expression of preference might too easily and too frequently fail to be significant.

One other set of lists was discarded—those in which more than six books appeared. This was on account of the difficulty of ranking eight, ten, or a dozen books with any precision. If you will call to mind, let us say, ten English classics, and attempt on the spur of the moment to rank them in the order of your preference, you will find that it is no small feat. It seems unwise, therefore, to attach importance to such long lists when made by high-school students in ten or fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of a class hour.

With all these subtractions, there were left the rankings of 5,803 students, representing 209 high-school classes, and including 21,684 “reactions.”¹

TABULATION BY CLASSES

The rankings that remained were tabulated by classes; that is to say, we obtained for each class the list of books read with the

¹ The word “reaction” is used here and throughout the remainder of this paper to mean the ranking of a single book by a single student. For example, a student who ranks a list of four books furnishes four reactions, and a class of twenty students, each of them ranking four books, furnishes eighty reactions.

number of students who ranked each book first, second, third, etc. For example, picking out one of the class tabulation sheets at random—it happens to belong to the 123d class that was tabulated—a class of 32 Freshmen, 13 boys and 19 girls—we have the following:

CLASS NO. 123

BOOKS READ	NO. OF TIMES RANKED			
	1st	2d	3d	4th
<i>Ivanhoe</i>	18	6	5	3
<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	8	9	10	5
<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	2	12	10	8
<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	4	5	7	16

A brief inspection of this table will show that the preference of this particular class is indicated by the order in which the names of the books are printed. *Ivanhoe* is easily the first choice, and *The Merchant of Venice* is a clear, though hardly a strong, second. *The Vision of Sir Launfal* has fewer firsts than *The Ancient Mariner*, but has so many more seconds and thirds that, for the class as a whole, it ranks above the latter—which you will note is placed last by half of the students.

Evidently, however, it is desirable to reduce such a tabulation to a single column of figures, and this was done for the class given above in the following manner: Each book was credited *one* for every student who ranked it last; credited *two* for every student who ranked it next to the last, or third; credited *three* for every student who ranked it third from last, or second; and credited *four* for every student who ranked it fourth from the last, or first. On the basis of the foregoing table this gives us the following results, the sums at the right indicating the ranking:

<i>Ivanhoe</i>	72	+	18	+	10	+	3	=	103
<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	32	+	27	+	20	+	5	=	84
<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	8	+	36	+	20	+	8	=	72
<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	16	+	15	+	14	+	16	=	61

The tabulations for all of the 209 classes were treated in the same way, and twenty-nine of these class rankings are given and discussed below.

TABULATION BY BOOKS

After all, however, any single high-school class is too small and presents, accordingly, too large a "probable error," to be very significant; and, since hardly any two classes read exactly the same combination of books, comparisons between classes were impossible. A grand tabulation was therefore made of all the lists under consideration *by books*, the limits of the classes being ignored. We obtained, for each book that was represented in the lists, the total number of students who had read it; the number of those reading it who had ranked it first; the number who had ranked it last (i.e., third in a list of three, or fourth in a list of four, or fifth in a list of five, or sixth in a list of six); and the number who had ranked it *median* (i.e., second in a list of three; second or third in a list of four; second, third, or fourth in a list of five; and second, third, fourth, or fifth in a list of six).

It seemed well enough to ignore the distinctions among the several median positions. After all, whether a student was ranking three books, or four, or five, or six, the significant expressions of preference were represented, I take it, in the assignment to the first place and the assignment to the end of the list. With respect to the other books in any student's list, the fact of importance was that they had not been preferred as favorite nor yet totally damned, and this fact was equally true for all middle positions—for both the second and the third books, for example, in a list of four. On the whole, it seemed to be more accurate, from the standpoint of the essential truth of the results, to ignore the differences among the middle positions than to attempt to take account of them.

We obtained, then, in this tabulation by books, a list of all the classics represented in the 5,803 rankings, with the total number of students who had read each book and the number who had ranked each first, in the middle positions, and last.

Here again, as in the case of the rankings by classes, it was clearly desirable—almost necessary, if any definite comparisons were to be made—to obtain an expression of our results in terms of a single column of figures—preferably in percentages.

At the risk of some tediousness I must explain the method of deriving these percentages. It was assumed, to begin with, that

if any book had been ranked first by all the students who read it, that book would have been entitled to 100 per cent. This being the case, it follows that the percentage with which any book should be credited for each first which it received may be obtained by dividing 100 per cent by the number of times the book was read. For example, a book which had been read by 100 students, and would have been given 100 per cent if all those students had ranked it first in their lists, should be credited with 1 per cent for every first it did receive—with 40 per cent if 40 out of the 100 students actually ranked it first. In the second place, it was assumed—somewhat arbitrarily, it must be admitted—that the value of a single median rank was two-thirds that of a first, and the value of a last, one-third that of a first. The book, for example, that had been read by 100 students and was entitled to 1 per cent for every first would be credited with two-thirds of 1 per cent for every median, and with one-third of 1 per cent for every last. Suppose that 40 of the 100 students reading this book ranked it first, as assumed above, that 30 put it median, and 30 last. This book would then be credited with 1 per cent for every first, or 40 per cent; also, with two-thirds of 1 per cent for each of its 30 medians, or 20 per cent; and finally, with one-third of 1 per cent for each of its 30 lasts, or 10 per cent—giving it a total rank of 70 per cent.

Or, take one real case—that of the leading book in the list, *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was read by 679 students. Dividing 100 per cent by 679, we have 0.147 per cent, the value of a single first. Two-thirds of this figure, or 0.098 per cent, is the value of a median; and one-third, or 0.049 per cent, the value of a last. Then, multiplying the value of each first, or 0.147 per cent, by the number of firsts received, or 499, we have 73.35 per cent; to which is to be added the product of the value of each median, or 0.098 per cent, by the number of medians, or 147, which is 14.40 per cent; and, also, the product of the value of each last, or 0.049 per cent, by the number of lasts, or 33, which is 1.61 per cent—giving a total rank for *A Tale of Two Cities* of 89.36 per cent.

The following table shows the ranking, on the basis of percentages obtained in this manner, of all the classics which were read

by as many as one hundred students. One classic—*Hamlet*—which was read by three fewer than one hundred is included because of the remarkable verdict in its case.

STUDENTS' RANKINGS OF ENGLISH CLASSICS

No. of classes represented	209
No. of students represented	5,803
No. of reactions	21,684

Title	Totals	First	Median	Last	Percentage
1. <i>Tale of Two Cities</i>	679	499	147	33	89
2. <i>Last of the Mohicans</i>	365	247	94	24	87
3. <i>Ivanhoe</i>	1190	677	413	100	83
4. <i>Hamlet</i>	97	50	42	5	82
5. <i>Enoch Arden</i>	258	74	145	39	81
6. <i>Silas Marner</i>	950	472	387	91	80
7. <i>Macbeth</i>	657	307	285	65	79
8. <i>Lady of the Lake</i>	752	205	386	101	77
9. <i>Merchant of Venice</i>	801	304	410	87	74.5
10. <i>Idylls of the King</i>	965	353	479	133	73.5
11. <i>As You Like It</i>	565	190	264	111	71
12. <i>Treasure Island</i>	420	141	191	88	70.5
13. <i>Vicar of Wakefield</i>	109	23	76	10	70.5
14. <i>House of the Seven Gables</i>	329	90	180	59	69.5
15. <i>Poe's Tales and Poems</i>	330	95	154	81	68
16. <i>Sketch Book</i>	568	118	359	91	67.5
17. <i>Burke's Conciliation</i>	664	128	412	124	66.5
18. <i>Life of Goldsmith</i>	289	53	145	91	66
19. <i>Julius Caesar</i>	1003	222	522	259	65
20. <i>Paradise Lost</i>	129	33	56	40	65
21. <i>Minor Poems</i>	440	92	245	103	65
22. <i>Sir Launfal</i>	622	153	341	128	65
23. <i>Burns's Poems</i>	227	43	142	42	64.5
24. <i>Twice Told Tales</i>	115	20	31	64	64
25. <i>Sohrab and Rustum</i>	715	146	375	194	64
26. <i>Bunker Hill Address</i>	259	47	129	83	62
27. <i>Farewell Address</i>	212	35	123	54	62
28. <i>Cranford</i>	105	12	68	25	62
29. <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	161	21	87	53	60
30. <i>De Coverley Papers</i>	736	72	347	317	59
31. <i>Iliad</i>	341	62	133	146	58.5
32. <i>Twelfth Night</i>	357	52	182	123	58
33. <i>Palgrave</i>	230	39	68	123	54
34. <i>Chaucer</i>	167	16	70	81	54
35. <i>Franklin's Autobiography</i>	221	22	87	112	53
36. <i>Macaulay's Johnson</i>	488	39	208	241	52.5
37. <i>Deserted Village</i>	195	11	86	98	52
38. <i>Ancient Mariner</i>	1075	128	448	499	52
39. <i>Sesame and Lilies</i>	312	36	127	149	51.5
40. <i>Essay on Burns</i>	337	25	121	191	50
41. <i>Emerson's Essays</i>	185	14	56	115	48

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

It is to be admitted at once, at the very outset of any discussion of the foregoing table, that the results there summarized are very rough in their character. Many minor distinctions are overridden when so many varying lists are thus summarily totaled. It is not at all the same thing as if all the books in question had been read by a single group of students of one given high-school year, with known proportions as to sex and age.

On the contrary it may be urged that in so large a number—obtainable only by such a summary totaling—the distorting effect of many of these minor differences may be supposed to have disappeared by cancellation. In the almost innumerable combinations of books in the different lists every book was repeatedly compared with every other book; and each book was read under every conceivable condition with respect to year, size of class, sex and age distribution, and the like. Moreover, it seems not unlikely that the importance of some of these distinctions has been exaggerated, because—as will appear from the class rankings, twenty-nine of which are given below—there was actually very little difference in the general trend of preference between classes of Freshmen and of Seniors, or between classes in which the girls were in a majority and classes in which the boys were the more numerous. Taking class by class, we find the ranking nearly always essentially the same as in the general table given just above, in which, as noted, class limits are ignored. It would appear that the entire high-school constituency reacts, roughly speaking, in the same way in this matter.

Nevertheless, I should be the first to decry attaching importance to minor differences in the list of percentages. I should say that a difference of 5 per cent in the foregoing table ought not to be considered at all. Probably a difference of 10 per cent is unworthy of note. But I take it that as between a group of books at the very top of the list and another group at the very bottom we have a clear expression, unmistakably reflecting the thought and feeling of 6,000 of our high-school students, and that this rather solid fact is worthy of some study.

ONE OR TWO STRIKING CONTRASTS

I will ask you to glance first at the bottom of the table. Probably your eye will be caught by our old friend, *The Ancient Mariner*—one of the three books which were read and reported on by as many as 1,000 students. Surely the record in this case is a little pathetic when we consider for how many years and with what enthusiasm we have been compelling practically all our high-school students to spend weeks on this book. A little over one-tenth of the students put it first in their lists; nearly one-half put it last—i.e., third in a list of three, or fourth in a list of four, or fifth in a list of five, or sixth in a list of six.

Compare with this one of the other books which was read by more than 1,000 students—*Ivanhoe*. The record is exactly reversed: more than one-half put it first, and fewer than one-tenth put it last.

You may notice, also, in the group at the bottom of the list—next to the end—the *Essay on Burns* (still “prescribed for study”). Of 337 students who read this classic, only 25 ranked it first, and 191—pretty close to two-thirds—put it as far down as they could get it.

Compare with this the book in the group at the top which was read by nearly the same number—*The Last of the Mohicans*. Again the entry is almost exactly reversed: two-thirds put it first; only 24 put it last.

TWO GROUPS

It seems to me that expressions as clear as these, even with respect to individual books, are important. Obviously, however, a comparison of groups, if two groups could be selected, would be still more instructive.

Let us select our groups on a mathematical basis.¹ If you will inspect the table you will find that—speaking in round numbers—each of the first ten books, through the *Idylls*, was ranked first by

¹ Attention is called to the fact that in the selection of these groups—and it is on these that the argument really turns—the column of percentage is not taken into account. The figures considered in the case of each book (total number of readers, number ranking it first, and number ranking it last) are merely totals, obtained from the original data by simple counting, having undergone no mathematical transformation.

from one-third to one-half of all the students who read it, and ranked last by only from one-tenth to one-seventh. For the last twelve books in the list, from the *De Coverley Papers* on, the record is reversed. Speaking still in round numbers, each of these books was ranked last by from one-third to one-half of all who read it, and ranked first by only from one-tenth to one-seventh.

Perhaps the first thing we notice in these two opposed groups is the superficial diversity of the books in each. The first ten books include four novels, but include also three plays and three poems; while the group at the bottom of the list comprises epic, lyric, essay, and autobiography; and within most of these forms, in both groups, widely different schools, methods, or moods are represented.

It is clear at once, from this diversity, that some of the more careless generalizations in regard to students' preferences are not supported.

For example, the too simple conclusion that students like best what is the easiest to read hardly explains 50 firsts and only 5 lasts from 97 readers of *Hamlet*; or, on the other hand, the condemnation of the *Autobiography*; or—stepping for a moment outside our two groups—the fact that Burke's *Conciliation* ranks practically even with Poe's *Tales*, and that *Lycidas* and its companion pieces were placed slightly above the poems of Burns.

What I may call the narrative hypothesis—that of themselves high-school children care only or chiefly for narrative—would seem at first glance to receive more support; yet it fails to account for the three Shakespearean plays in the top group, or to explain the fact that six of the twelve pieces in the group at the end are narratives—including the *Iliad* and Chaucer!

Likewise, the notion that the books that have been a good while in the lists, that have come to be well edited, with which teachers have had experience, are the ones that succeed is not quite consistent with the presence of the *De Coverley Papers*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and the essays on Johnson and Burns in our little inferno at the end.

THE PRINCIPLE

Is there, then, any characteristic that is common to those ten diverse books at the top? Is there a common characteristic to be

found in the twelve books of the other group? And are these two characteristics by any chance antipodal? If it should prove to be so, surely, in view of what these groups represent, we have our finger on an important principle.

It seems to me that such a principle does emerge, and that it may be stated as follows:

That the popular books in this list are uniformly books containing *vivid and dramatic presentations of human life, with strong ethical import*: while the books that are distinctly disliked are those in which the primary appeal is esthetic, stylistic, which convey their message indirectly through their beauty or humor, or which present human life, not with bold plainness, but delicately, lightly, subtly.

I believe that all will agree at once that the description of the popular book just given fits every book in our first group of ten. It may be objected, however, that these books make an esthetic appeal, also, no less perhaps than do the books that are condemned in the other list. That, I take it, is not the point. The point is that in the first group all that is merely esthetic, all the pure beauty, the delicacy, the subtlety, may be *subtracted*—as it is for the high-school student, whose nature has not developed to the point where these things interest him—and still leave a vivid picture of human life, with its “moral,” its moving lesson, to appeal to a boy or girl entering upon adolescence and beginning to be interested in human relations and ethical principles. But in the case of *The Ancient Mariner* or the Palgrave lyrics, if you shut your eyes entirely to the mere beauty—or haven’t your eyes open to it yet, as is the case with the high-school youngster—what is there left? Wouldn’t you put them last yourself?

But it may further be objected that not all of the books in the bottom group are like *The Ancient Mariner* and Palgrave—that the *Iliad*, for example, and Franklin’s *Autobiography* present vivid pictures of life, with moral import enough for anybody. This is certainly true. And yet in the *Iliad* does the story, the recital of adventures, really appeal even to us as the story of Shylock, or Silas Marner, or Sidney Carton appeals? Maybe the mere story of the *Iliad* did make an appeal to us once—when we were eight or ten

years old. But our high-school students have left that stage behind, too. Is it not really the manner of telling, the beauty of simplicity in the naked narrative, that charms us in the Greek epic? And in Franklin—are the bald facts of rather prosaic years the things for which we read, or is it really the bold directness of statement that holds us? But this pleasure in simplicity, in the classic style, is the last reach of esthetic appreciation. Your students will read much of their Palgrave with real enthusiasm and will recite *The Ancient Mariner* in their sleep before they can enjoy the *Iliad* again, or Franklin—enjoy them as we enjoy them. And I believe that something of the same sort will be found to be true of every book of those twelve at the end of the list.

I do not wish to do more than suggest this interpretation and ask you to look over the tables bearing it in mind. The primary object of this paper is, of course, to present the bare facts collected from the data which the members of this Association co-operated in assembling.

THIRTY INDIVIDUAL CLASSES

Below are given, by way of supplement, twenty-nine class rankings such as are described on p. 260 above. These twenty-nine lists have been selected mathematically, being all the lists in which the number obtained for the favored book was as high as 100 (together with two lists headed by 98), and in which the last book had one-half, or less, as many points, roughly speaking, as the favorite. It was considered that a class too small to give 100 points to its favorite book was too small to be significant, separately considered; and that where the number of points assigned to the last book in a list was much over one-half as large as the number assigned to the first book, the ranking was too indecisive to be significant.

It will be noted, on inspection, that the principle of preference deduced above from the general table seems to be confirmed over and over again, almost without exception, in these twenty-nine rankings by individual classes. It is particularly interesting, I think, to see classes of every high-school year and of the most varied sex proportion reacting with such uniformity.

RANKINGS OF INDIVIDUAL CLASSES

1.	Sophomore class: 10 boys, 17 girls	
	<i>Tale of Two Cities</i>	102
	<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	65
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	53
	<i>Sir Roger de Coverley</i>	44
2.	Sophomore class: 28 boys, 33 girls	
	<i>Tale of Two Cities</i>	137
	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	96
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	70
3.	Freshman class: 45 boys, 64 girls	
	<i>Last of the Mohicans</i>	258
	<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	252
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	144
4.	Freshman class: 19 boys, 13 girls	
	<i>Last of the Mohicans</i>	122
	<i>Treasure Island</i>	89
	<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	61
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	48
5.	Sophomore class: 20 boys, 20 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	160
	<i>Enoch Arden</i>	109
	<i>Sohrab and Rustum</i>	89
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	71
6.	Freshman class: 22 boys, 21 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	157
	<i>Lady of the Lake</i>	116
	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	97
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	61
7.	Junior class: 23 boys, 25 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	171
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	148
	<i>Irving's Life of Goldsmith</i>	97
	<i>Macaulay's Essay on Johnson</i>	65
8.	Sophomore class: 13 boys, 45 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	166
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	114
	<i>Sir Roger de Coverley</i>	77
9.	Sophomore class: 10 boys, 23 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	126
	<i>Lady of the Lake</i>	91
	<i>Burns's Poems</i>	72
	<i>Carlyle's Essay on Burns</i>	41
10.	Freshman class: 38 boys, 39 girls	
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	192
	<i>Lady of the Lake</i>	163
	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	91

11.	Freshman class: 23 boys, 7 girls	
	<i>Enoch Arden</i>	101
	<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	89
	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	85
	<i>Treasure Island</i>	44
12.	Sophomore class: 14 boys, 15 girls	
	<i>Silas Marner</i>	98
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	71
	<i>Macbeth</i>	55
	<i>Essay on Burns</i>	33
13.	Freshman class: 18 boys, 31 girls	
	<i>Silas Marner</i>	139
	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	84
	<i>Iliad</i>	71
14.	Senior class: 20 boys, 30 girls	
	<i>Silas Marner</i>	123
	Milton's Minor Poems	98
	<i>Golden Treasury</i>	49
15.	Sophomore class: 15 boys, 21 girls	
	<i>Silas Marner</i>	140
	<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	84
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	71
	<i>Sir Roger de Coverley</i>	65
16.	Junior class: 23 boys, 20 girls	
	<i>Macbeth</i>	127
	Milton's Minor Poems	74
	<i>Sesame and Lilies</i>	69
17.	Junior class: 8 boys, 18 girls	
	<i>Macbeth</i>	95
	Milton's Minor Poems	65
	<i>Essay on Johnson</i>	56
	Emerson's <i>Essays</i>	44
18.	Sophomore class: 19 boys, 26 girls	
	<i>Lady of the Lake</i>	131
	Old English Ballads	73
	<i>Sir Roger de Coverley</i>	72
19.	Junior class: 18 boys, 22 girls	
	<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	108
	<i>Iliad</i>	90
	<i>Essay on Burns</i>	47
20.	Junior class: 13 boys, 19 girls	
	<i>Merchant of Venice</i>	103
	<i>Marmion</i>	93
	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	56
	<i>As You Like It</i>	54

21.	Junior class: 15 boys, 34 girls	
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	129
	<i>Julius Caesar</i>	101
	<i>Sesame and Lilies</i>	58
22.	Junior class: 13 boys, 33 girls	
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	108
	<i>House of Seven Gables</i>	98
	<i>Sesame and Lilies</i>	59
23.	Junior class: 14 boys, 17 girls	
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	136
	<i>Macbeth</i>	102
	<i>Bunker Hill Oration</i>	79
	<i>Essay on Johnson</i>	66
24.	Sophomore class: 40 boys, 52 girls	
	<i>Idylls of the King</i>	297
	<i>Sir Roger de Coverley</i>	247
	<i>Ancient Mariner</i>	244
	<i>Essay on Johnson</i>	137
25.	Freshman class: 47 boys, 59 girls	
	<i>Vision of Sir Launfal</i>	245
	<i>Iliad</i>	196
	<i>Sketch Book</i>	185
26.	Junior class: 17 boys, 29 girls	
	Burns' Poems	154
	<i>Golden Treasury</i>	136
	<i>Essay on Burns</i>	103
	<i>Burke's Conciliation</i>	76
27.	Freshman class: 15 boys, 24 girls	
	<i>Dog of Flanders</i>	104
	<i>Marmion</i>	79
	<i>Iliad</i>	52
28.	Junior class: 9 boys, 11 girls	
	<i>Ben Hur</i>	98
	<i>Tale of Two Cities</i>	74
	<i>Ivanhoe</i>	59
	<i>Scarlet Letter</i>	44
	<i>Vicar of Wakefield</i>	28
29.	Sophomore class: 33, boys 39 girls	
	<i>Silas Marner</i>	167
	<i>Sohrab and Rustum</i>	153
	<i>Twice Told Tales</i>	85

PRACTICAL CONCLUSION

The writer has been asked, by persons who seemed disposed to grant that the principle of preference stated above is more or less conclusively established and probably true, whether or not he

would himself care to act upon it by dropping from our lists of reading some of the books in our bottom group. Such a question carries us, of course, far beyond the scope of a paper like the present, which aims merely to give certain facts in regard to the expressed preferences of a group of students and to suggest a possible interpretation of the results. Granting both the facts and the interpretation, the cue for action is still far from complete. Under certain theories of formal discipline and educational values, the logical conclusion would be to drop out all the first ten books and to use exclusively the unpopular kind. As an expression of personal opinion merely, the writer would reply to the question asked that, from his own experience as a teacher and his memories of his own high-school days, he believes that a taste for reading and a growth of appreciation proceed more readily from books in which the student feels some interest than from books which he actively dislikes; and that, therefore, in a short and crowded course, when only a very little can be read, the principle of preference should guide to a considerable extent. In other words, if I were myself at the present time in charge of a high-school English course, I should drop out the books in our lower group, and some others like them—i.e., *books characterized by a predominance of the purely esthetic in their appeal*—and should use mainly books having the general characteristics common to our ten favorites—*vivid, dramatic presentation of human life, and strong ethical appeal*.

There is no danger, I presume, so long as we confine our lists to books that are literature, of including any piece that will not afford enough in the way of beauty, style, and the like, to supply the needs of any nascent esthetic taste that may develop in precocious individuals during the high-school stage. Surely such a taste is more likely to be aroused and developed in connection with a strong interest, of the kind already natural to the student, in a moving human story, than by administering strong doses of beauty, given "straight" as it were, in the form of loathsome dryness—for "dry" is the comment gratuitously added perhaps a thousand times, in the lists on which this paper is based, to the books of the class represented in our bottom group.